

Reflections on Contemporary Georgia – Vision from Czech Republic

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„There is no guarantee that the civil society is always benign. But we must take the risk. The civil society corresponds to the historical possibilities of man and history as a drama of good and evil. This is the dignity of man: the choice of good and evil.“

Merab Mamardashvili

Brief Discourse on Georgia’s Desire to become European Democratic Country

Georgia’s political and social aspirations are an open secret. These aspirations are based on country’s strong desire to build democracy and civil society in Georgia, to integrate into the European space of democratic and civic values and thus to confirm again for modern world that Georgia is a democratic European state. But definitely the task is not so simple, it is very challenging and still full with various obstacles. Georgia still has to pass a long way of democratization in order to achieve its democratic goals and finally to be formed not transitional democracy but real democracy in our own country.

In Czech Republic, where I live now, it took approximately 10 years to become democratic country. Since 1989 when communism died in this country, Czech Republic started rapid consolidation of democratic values that was doubtlessly led by Václav Havel. Currently, Czech Republic returned to its historical roots and enjoys to be democratic European country. However, here I mean no way that there are no problems in Czech Republic and that here we have absolute democracy. In fact, there is no absolute democracy in our universe.

It took 10 years for Czech Republic to achieve its goals and to become European democracy. And despite perfect progress which it experienced by the end of 1990s, it was possible for Czech Republic to join EU only in 2004, while it joined NATO in 1999. So, even for Czech Republic which is located in the central area of Europe and whose political and social values always were truly European, it was still hard work to rehabilitate and to become real European democratic society.

So, now we can imagine how difficult it is for Georgia to pass sensitive way of democratization which should lead us to be formed as European democratic country. Despite some progress which Georgia achieved since Rose Revolution of November 2003 that can be seen in police and military reforms, Georgia still faces serious difficulties in building a democratic and civil society. It is still very difficult for some to say whether Georgia has opportunity to become European country and these problems and obstacles are not only related with political authority.

Weak civil society, conformist young generation, ineffective and powerless opposition, lack of critical judgment within society – these are main problems and obstacles for building of real democracy in Georgia. This is not what Georgia gained after the Rose Revolution, but this is simply soviet legacy of Georgia, this is a sorrowful destiny of Georgia that even Rose Revolution could not change. It is hard to agree with the Georgian opposition groups who claim that Saakashvili's administration established dictatorship after the Rose Revolution. I would say that so-called idea of „strong hand“ is a very successful model of governing Georgian country and Saakashvili just follows this model. The only power that can stop implementation of the idea of „strong hand“ is only society or people. And the idea of „strong hand“ is not linked with the philosophy of dictatorship, it is just another phenomenon which is characterizing for former soviet countries, including Georgia.

Czech Intellectuals on Georgia's Democratization

Despite serious difficulties and problems which Georgia faces now, here in Central Europe Georgia is still very promising country and model of democratic transformation after the Rose Revolution. Saakashvili is a popular person both in Brussels and other cities of Europe. Rose Revolution of November 2003 made good impressions for European intellectuals to think and speak about bright future of democracy in Georgia, some of them think that it will take long time for Georgia but still they believe that Georgia selected good path for democratization. Petr

Kratochvil, Deputy Director of the Prague Institute of International Relations said following: **„There is no doubt that democracy in Georgia has improved after the Rose Revolution. However, comparing with the west, Georgian democracy is still under the way of development and not such strong as it is in west. Czech Republic also experienced democratic reforms and it took couple of years, however we still achieved to become democratic in short period. Regarding Georgia, I think it will take much long time“.** However, Petr Kratochvil also noted that there are some important steps that Georgian government should take in order to achieve its democratic goals: **„Well, point is that if you want to have a real democracy this is important not only to adopt democratic laws and access democratic principles, but also to implement them. Georgia should be stronger for implementation of adopted laws and democratic principles as well. I think that the most important for Georgia is to strengthen institutional building, to carry out strong anticorruption measures, to support building of autonomous capacity and etc. Also, poverty reduction should be important subject for Georgia.“**

This is not only Czech think-tanks who think that democracy in Georgia improved and who believe in perfect democratic future of Georgia, but the Czech officials think also similarly. This is what Tomas Szunyog, Director of South-East and Eastern European Department at the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: **„We hope that Georgia can become fully democratic country and not transitional one. We have full confidence with your government and this is very clear that you made very good progress in terms of democratic development after the Rose Revolution. I would like also to note that there is a stable political landscape in Georgia, economic policy is developing and social standards of living are higher“.**

Above mentioned speech given by Mr. Szunyog is a very clear example of political sympathies provided by some influential Czech politicians and decision makers towards Georgia. And this is not only Czech Republic in Central Europe who has such political sympathies towards Saakashvili's government, you can see such support in other countries as well.

What are the reasons of European support for current political authority in Georgia? Another Czech intellectual, Marek Vozka who is very familiar with Georgia and currently works for influential Czech foundation „People in Need“ said: **„I would say that before the collapse of Soviet Union and during the collapse of it, every member countries of USSR stayed on same political line. After collapse of USSR, some countries still remained on same old line,**

including Russia. But as for Georgia, it is very visible especially after the Rose Revolution that situation changed significantly. Saakashvili's government is much more effective and the reforms which your government carried out are democratic“

Georgia's Membership to EU and NATO – A Pessimistic Landscape

However, despite of positive point of views expressed by leading Czech experts on current political processes in Georgia, they have still sceptical view on the question of Georgia's possible membership for EU and NATO. This is well-known that Georgia strives to join EU and NATO and declared that this is strong political will of contemporary Georgia to become full member of European family. Here, in Czech Republic, almost majority of Czech experts and academicians believe that Georgia has less chances to join EU. **„As regarding EU, here subject is much more pessimistic. And again problem comes from EU, and problem is that EU has adopted and introduced to Georgia ENP as a substitute of Georgia's membership to EU, like it did for Ukraine and Moldova as well. I think that that question of Georgia's membership to EU is a subject of political decision.“**, said Petr Kratochvil.

So, it seems that we should not be happy to enjoy with having ENP in Georgia, however many Georgian NGOs and government itself try to make sure people that ENP is a step for EU membership. But the truth is that ENP is a substitute for Georgia to EU membership, the Georgian NGOs tend to misrepresent it, probably, due to so-called „Political Correctness“. As for NATO, here Petr Kratochvil is still sceptical, however, he noted that chances for NATO are bigger for Georgia: **„Well, I understand why Georgia has such a strong desire to join NATO, but this topic for me more or less is sceptical and this not due to Georgia but due to NATO approach. Well, point is that NATO itself is very sceptical about Georgia's membership, and this is not so much linked with the factor of Russia as many interprets it, but this is due to frozen conflicts which exist in Georgia. However, if you compare with chances for EU membership, it is very clear that chances for NATO are bigger.“** he said.

Representative of Czech government also thinks that Georgia's possible membership to EU is a very complex question, however Czech government fully supports to Georgia's aim and aspiration to join EU but at the same time they say that this would be very long and difficult way for Georgia. This is what Tomas Szunyog said: **„This is very complex question. Currently, EU is mostly focused of having negotiations with applicant countries which are Croatia,**

Macedonia and Turkey. Also mention should be made that another issue is whether Georgia is ready to join EU. I think that Georgia still has many tasks to implement in this regard and it needs to pass long way“. Regarding NATO, here Mr. Szunyog strongly believes that Georgia is a serious partner of NATO, however, here also he believes that this would be long way for Georgia **„Georgia is a serious partner of NATO. We would also strongly support Georgia’s inclusion to MAP. This is right that you carried out positive defense reforms but joining of NATO is more demanding than only military reforms. I would say that this will be a step-by-step process for Georgia“** said Thomas Szunyog.

It is very clear that Georgian population is not aware of what NATO is. Curiously, most of the people believe in popular political speech in Georgia that NATO is a pro-humanist, democratic union, while in fact NATO frequently broke down the basic principles of democratic values and the case Balkan region is a very clear example of it.

Why Georgia is Important for European Democracies?

At first glance probably this question seems to be both difficult and simple. Petr Kratochvíl answered this question perfectly: **„Georgia is a very important country for Europe, because we share same common values. Georgia shares European and generally western values and I would say that Georgia is a part of European community in many aspects“.**

This is more than truth. But at the same time we still have to take many steps to be perfect member of European family and this is not only linked with building strong political and economic system, but this is importantly related with strengthening formation of strong free civil society in Georgia and to the promotion of basic civic and democratic values. Georgia should form effective society with creative and critical judgment and to defeat conformism as a legacy of soviet social lifestyle.

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