European and Georgian Identity - Past and Present

ევროპული და ქართული იდენტობა - წარსული და თანამედროვეობა

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Eka Kvachantiradze[1a]
ეკა კვაჭანტირაძე[1]
[1] Caucasus University, Tbilisi, Georgia
[1] კავკასიის უნივერსიტეტი, თბილისი, საქართველო
* ekvachantiradze@cu.edu.ge

Abstract

Introduction. In the context of European Union enlargement, the question of national identity has acquired renewed relevance. For Georgia, as a candidate country, European integration raises a fundamental question: how can a nation accede to a community founded on shared values while preserving its historical and cultural distinctiveness? Enlargement is thus not merely a political, economic and legal process, but also a matter of identity and belonging. This paper examines the essence of Georgian national identity and its relationship to European identity, exploring the markers, values and principles that characterize both and distinguish them from each other and from other cultural traditions. **Methodology.** The study employs a comparative historical and cultural analysis of European and Georgian identities from antiquity to the present. National identity is conceptualized as a form of collective consciousness, manifested in the individual's identification with a community's values, historical experience and cultural framework. **Results.** The paper argues that the sustainable development of a national community depends not solely on political and economic progress, but fundamentally on the continuity of its national identity. Society is conceived as a community bound by a sense of belonging and shared values, which enable it to pursue collective objectives. In a globalized world, nations preserve their distinctiveness through self-determination, self-affirmation and self-definition. The paper examines the principal historical and cultural factors that have shaped both identities, as well as differences in their value systems and patterns of collective thought. **Conclusion.** The study identifies both points of convergence and distinctive features of European and Georgian identities. It demonstrates that shared values constitute a foundation for Georgia's European integration, while its cultural particularities form part of Europe's diversity rather than an obstacle to it. The paper concludes that a clear understanding of national identity is a prerequisite for meaningful participation in an enlarged European Union.

Keywords: European identity; Georgian national identity; Christianity; value system; EU enlargement.

აბსტრაქტი

შესავალი: ევროკავშირის გაფართოების კონტექსტში ეროვნული იდენტობის საკითხი სულ უფრო მეტ აქტუალობას იძენს. საქართველოსთვის, როგორც კანდიდატი ქვეყნისთვის, ევროპული ინტეგრაცია მნიშვნელოვან კითხვას აჩენს: როგორ შეუძლია ერს გაწევრიანდეს საერთო ღირებულებებზე დაფუძნებულ ერთობაში და ამავდროულად შეინარჩუნოს საკუთარი ისტორიული და კულტურული თავისთავადობა? გაფართოება მხოლოდ პოლიტიკური, ეკონომიკური და სამართლებრივი პროცესი არ არის. ის იდენტობისა და კუთვნილების საკითხიცაა. ნაშრომის მიზანია ქართული ეროვნული იდენტობის არსისა და მისი ევროპულ იდენტობასთან მიმართების კვლევა. ნაშრომი პასუხობს კითხვებს: რომელი ნიშნებით შეიძლება ამ იდენტობების გაგება და დასაბუთება? რა ღირებულებები და პრინციპები ახასიათებს მათ? რით განსხვავდებიან ისინი ერთმანეთისგან და სხვა კულტურული ტრადიციებისგან?

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მეთოდოლოგია: კვლევა ეფუძნება ევროპული და ქართული იდენტობების შედარებით ისტორიულ და კულტურულ ანალიზს ანტიკური ხანიდან დღემდე. ეროვნული იდენტობა განიხილება როგორც კოლექტიური ცნობიერების ფორმა, რომელიც ინდივიდის მიერ ერთობის ღირებულებებთან, ისტორიულ გამოცდილებასა და კულტურულ ჩარჩოსთან თვითიდენტიფიკაციაში გამოიხატება. **შედეგები**: ნაშრომში დასაბუთებულია, რომ ეროვნული ერთობის მდგრადი განვითარება მხოლოდ პოლიტიკურ და ეკონომიკურ პროგრესზე არ არის დამოკიდებული. ის უპირველეს ყოვლისა ეროვნული იდენტობის უწყვეტობას ეყრდნობა. საზოგადოება განიხილება არა როგორც ცალკეულ ინდივიდთა ერთობლიობა, არამედ როგორც ერთობა, რომელსაც კუთვნილების განცდა და საერთო ღირებულებები აერთიანებს. სწორედ საერთო ღირებულებები და პრინციპები აძლევს საზოგადოებას კოლექტიური მიზნების მიღწევის შესაძლებლობას. გლობალიზებულ სამყაროში ერები საკუთარ თავისთავადობას თვითგამორკვევის, თვითდამკვიდრებისა და თვითგანსაზღვრის გზით ინარჩუნებენ. ნაშრომი განიხილავს იმ ძირითად ისტორიულ და კულტურულ ფაქტორებს, რომლებმაც ევროპული და ქართული იდენტობები ჩამოაყალიბა. ასევე აანალიზებს მათ ღირებულებათა სისტემებსა და კოლექტიური აზროვნების მოდელებს შორის განსხვავებებს. **დასკვნა:** კვლევა ავლენს ევროპული და ქართული იდენტობების როგორც თანხვედრის წერტილებს, ისე განმასხვავებელ ნიშნებს. ნაჩვენებია, რომ საერთო ღირებულებები საქართველოს ევროპული ინტეგრაციის საფუძველს ქმნის, ხოლო მისი კულტურული თავისებურებები ევროპის მრავალფეროვნების ნაწილია და არა ინტეგრაციის დაბრკოლება. ეროვნული იდენტობის მკაფიო გააზრება გაფართოებულ ევროკავშირში შინაარსიანი მონაწილეობის წინაპირობაა. ეს განსაკუთრებით მნიშვნელოვანია XXI საუკუნეში, როდესაც ევროპული ერთობა ახალი წევრებით ფართოვდება.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ევროპული იდენტობა, ქართული ეროვნული იდენტობა, ქრისტიანობა, ღირებულებათა სისტემა, ევროკავშირის გაფართოება.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Problem and Relevance

In the context of European integration and the enlargement of the European Union, the relationship between national identity and European identity has acquired renewed significance. The question is particularly relevant for Georgia, which was granted EU candidate status in December 2023. The significance of national identity becomes particularly evident in an increasingly globalized world, where political, economic, and technological transformations challenge the continuity of established cultural traditions and collective perceptions. National identity therefore represents more than a set of cultural characteristics or historical symbols. It constitutes a form of collective consciousness through which individuals recognize their belonging to a particular community and identify themselves with its historical experience, values, and cultural framework (Smith, 1991).

In the Georgian context, the formation of national identity has been closely associated with Christianity, the Georgian language, historical statehood, and collective historical memory. Among these elements, Christianity has played a particularly significant role. Christianity was equally important in the historical formation of European identity. Europe increasingly came to be understood not merely as a geographical designation but also as a community connected through shared religious and cultural foundations (Cantor, 1993; Le Goff, 2005). Nevertheless, the existence of common Christian foundations did not result in identical historical trajectories for Georgia and Europe. One particularly significant difference emerged during the eleventh century, when the Gregorian Reform initiated a process of redefining the relationship between the Church and secular political authority in Western Europe (Cushing, 2005). In Georgia, by contrast, the relationship between ecclesiastical and political institutions developed along a different historical path, when the Church became closely involved in the administration and consolidation of the state.

The starting assumption of this study is that the preservation of Georgian national identity and participation in European integration are not necessarily contradictory processes. Rather, a clear understanding of national identity, its historical foundations, and its system of values can provide an important basis for meaningful participation in a broader European community. Georgia's cultural and historical particularities need not be perceived as barriers to integration; they can also be understood as part of Europe's wider historical and cultural diversity.

The main research questions are therefore:

- What historical, religious, and cultural factors contributed to the formation of Georgian national identity and European identity?
- What role did Christianity play in shaping the collective consciousness and systems of values of Georgian and European societies?
- How did differences in political institutions and in the relationship between Church and state influence the historical development of Georgian and European identities?
- What are the principal similarities and differences between Georgian and European systems of values and patterns of collective thinking?
- How did the Renaissance, secularization, political revolutions, modern ideologies, and globalization influence the transformation of European and Georgian identities?
- Which historical and cultural elements have ensured the continuity of Georgian national identity despite the loss of political independence and other major historical challenges?
- How can Georgia preserve its historical and cultural distinctiveness while participating meaningfully in European integration?

Answering this questions is important for understanding not only the historical relationship between Georgia and Europe but also the contemporary significance of national identity in an expanding European Union. It makes it possible to examine European integration not simply as a process of political and institutional convergence, but also as a broader question of cultural belonging, historical continuity, and shared values.

2. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach based primarily on comparative historical and cultural analysis. The research examines the formation and transformation of Georgian and European identities from antiquity to the contemporary period.

The methodological framework combines the following approaches:

Historical analysis is used to examine major historical events and transformations that influenced Georgian and European identities.

Comparative analysis identifies similarities and differences between Georgian and European historical experiences, particularly regarding the role of Christianity, the development of political institutions, the relationship between religious and secular authority, and the formation of collective values and patterns of thought.

Cultural and civilizational analysis explores the significance of religion, language, historical memory, and cultural traditions in shaping collective consciousness and preserving national identity.

Conceptual analysis examines national identity as a form of collective consciousness expressed through individuals' identification with a community's shared historical experiences, cultural traditions, and systems of values. The theoretical understanding of national identity draws particularly on Anthony D. Smith's conceptualization of national identity, emphasizing the importance of shared historical memories, cultural elements, collective traditions, and a sense of belonging (Smith, 1991).

3. Literature Review

National identity is a multidimensional concept that encompasses the historical, cultural, political, linguistic and religious characteristics through which individuals identify themselves as members of a particular national community. One of the influential theoretical approaches to national identity is presented by Anthony D. Smith (1991), who emphasizes the significance of historical continuity, collective myths, memories, traditions and cultural symbols in the formation and preservation of national communities. From this perspective, national identity is rooted in a shared understanding of the past and in the recognition of cultural characteristics that distinguish one community from another. These elements provide a framework within which individuals develop a sense of belonging and identify themselves with a particular national group.

European identity has developed through a complex historical process shaped by the interaction of religious, philosophical, political and cultural traditions. Christianity played a particularly important role in the formation of European civilization, providing a common spiritual and cultural framework for societies

that differed in language, political organization and historical experience. As Norman F. Cantor (1993) demonstrates in his analysis of medieval European civilization, the Christian tradition contributed significantly to the formation of a shared European cultural consciousness. The spread of Christianity among different European peoples gradually established a common religious and intellectual framework that transcended political and territorial divisions. In this sense, medieval European identity was closely associated with belonging to the Christian world.

Jacques Le Goff (2005) similarly emphasizes the historical processes through which Europe emerged as a distinct cultural and civilizational space. The development of common religious institutions, intellectual traditions and cultural practices contributed to the formation of a broader sense of European belonging.

The historical relationship between Georgia and the Byzantine world further illustrates the importance of religious and cultural affiliations in shaping Georgian identity. As discussed by Frend (1972) and Meyendorff (1989), the theological controversies of early Christianity had significant implications for the religious and political organization of the Christian world. These developments also influenced the historical choices of Georgian political and ecclesiastical authorities.

The Gregorian Reform and the changing relationship between ecclesiastical and secular authority in medieval Europe provide another important point of comparison. As Cushing (2005) demonstrates, the eleventh-century reforms fundamentally transformed the relationship between the Church and political authority in Western Europe. The Georgian experience, however, developed within a different historical and institutional framework, characterized by closer cooperation between ecclesiastical and royal authority during certain periods.

Thus, although European and Georgian identities share important historical and religious foundations, their development was shaped by different political circumstances, institutional arrangements and intellectual traditions. Understanding these similarities and differences is essential for examining the relationship between Georgian national identity and the broader European civilizational space.

4. Historical and Cultural Foundations of European and Georgian Identity

National identity is our collective consciousness - that is, an individual's understanding of the circumstances and characteristics that enable them to connect with or identify themselves with a particular community (Smith, 1991). The main theme of the article is to explore what our national identity truly is. What are the key markers that demonstrate European and Georgian self-consciousness? What values and principles are characteristic of these ethnic groups and distinguish them from others? To illustrate this, the article presents a comparative analysis of Georgian and European identities. We will discuss the key issues that have shaped the distinct evolution of Georgian and European identities, as well as their differing attitudes and mental frameworks. The foundation of both Georgian and European identity is Christianity. Christianity holds a fundamental significance in the development of both the European and Georgian worlds. The adoption of Christianity marked the beginning of the definition of the Georgian people's national mission. Christianity becam the principal marker of Georgian identity.

Christianity saved Rome from spiritual degeneration, and Christian thought became the foundation of Roman intellectual life. Christian values also played a crucial role in shaping its system of values. In the context of Christianization, the following similarities and differences emerged between the Georgian and Roman worlds in terms of their respective systems of values: **a)** In both cases, the decision to adopt Christianity was made by the rulers of the country. Both Constantine, the Roman Emperor, and Mirian, the King of Kartli, came to accept the Christian faith after experiencing a personal crisis or ordeal. **b)** In Constantine's case, 25 years passed between his initial embrace of Christianity and his baptism, whereas Mirian was baptized immediately. **c)** In Constantine's case, there was no fundamental reassessment of his values, whereas in Mirian's case, a profound inner personal transformation is clearly evident. **d)** First, Mirian converted to Christianity, and then the whole nation. In Constantine's case, the people first became convinced of his divine election, and only afterward was the emperor baptized. **e)** In Constantine's understanding, the Christian faith came not through the Church but was granted to him directly, without the mediation of the Church, and the Church subsequently recognized it. Mirian, by contrast, received the new faith through the Church. For him, Christianity was conveyed through a missionary, Saint Nino. **f)** In order to establish Christianity in Kartli, Mirian gave up his own residence, whereas Constantine dedicated a new capital, Constantinople, to Christianity. **g)** In Rome, Christianity served as an instrument of politics, whereas in Kartli it served as a foundation for its system of values.

Thus, in the formation of the value systems of both the Roman and Georgian communities, Christian values became of fundamental importance. Christianity saved Rome from spiritual degeneration. For Georgia, Christianity became a civilizational choice and the principal marker of Georgian identity.

In the 5th century, Rome's Dyophysitism was challenged by the Miaphysites, toward whom Emperor Zenon and Patriarch Acacius were compelled to make concessions and issued the *Henotikon*, or a conciliatory decree intended to reconcile Dyophysites and Miaphysites. Against the backdrop of these doctrinal concessions, the rights of the Miaphysites were recognized (Frend, 1972). Georgia faced a choice between Iran and Rome. The position of Vakhtang Gorgasali, the King of Kartli during this period, is particularly interesting, as his choice was based on values rather than political considerations. Despite Iran's political strength, Georgia oriented itself toward Rome and toward the West - not on political or geographical grounds, but precisely on civilizational grounds. Byzantine Dyophysitism was decisive for Georgia, and therefore Georgia aligned itself with the *Henotikon*. Kartli gained ecclesiastical independence from the Patriarchate of Antioch and was granted autocephaly (Japaridze, 2022). Vakhtang was more a servant of his nation than merely its political leader. He was determined to lead the country based on a choice of values rather than a political calculation. He did not seek political prosperity from the West. If prosperity had been the priority, choosing the stronger East (Iran) would have been less problematic and more politically justifiable. However, if Byzantium was chosen, it represented a justified choice based on shared values. Rome, however, was the one that recognized and upheld those values. From a contemporary perspective, Vakhtang's decision might not appear justified, since it would not have brought immediate political benefits. Today, we are often presented with choices based solely on political considerations. This does not mean that Vakhtang had no political interests when making his decision, rather, the issue is one of priorities.

In the **6th century**, Byzantium's attitude toward the Miaphysites changed. The Byzantine Emperor Justinian and his successors sought to facilitate the administration of the empire by achieving greater geographical unity and attempting to establish social and ethnic cohesion on the basis of religion. Their principle was: **"One state, one religion"** (Meyendorff, 1989)**.** Within the unified state, Dyophysitism was officially recognized, which resulted in the persecution of Miaphysites. From the 6th century onward, the Church of Kartli continued the ecclesiastical policy developed by Vakhtang Gorgasali and, like the Orthodox Church of Byzantium, embraced Chalcedonian Christianity. Kartli officially supported an anti-Miaphysite course.

The western Georgian kingdom of Lazica was also a supporter of a pro-Western orientation. The value-based choice of Eastern Georgia was reinforced by the events surrounding the murder of King Gubaz in western Georgia. The Byzantines killed Gubaz, the king of Egrisi (Lazica). The political elite of Egrisi convened an assembly at which a choice had to be made between Iran and Byzantium - in other words, between the East and the West. The choice was difficult, but ultimately, they chose Byzantium - the very Byzantium that had killed their king - because it embodied their central value: Christianity. Egrisi's Western choice was therefore evidence of a value-based decision, demonstrating its commitment to Christianity. When Egrisi chose Byzantium despite the murder of its king, it did so primarily because Byzantium was Christian, and Christianity was regarded as essential to preserving Georgian identity. Georgia's Western orientation was not merely a geographical direction. It was a means of preserving its self-identity. Even after the death of Gubaz, Egrisi continued to choose the world that it perceived as its spiritual foundation. Throughout the medieval period, Georgia's choices were based not on political considerations, but on values. Thus, in the 6th century, Europe and Georgia continued to follow a pro-Christian course and to embrace Christian values.

The unity of Georgia and Europe - that is, the relationship between Georgia and Europe - was formed in the context of their shared Christian identity. Beginning in the **7th century**, the process of Christianization in Europe intensified. From the 6th-7th centuries, Christianity spread among the Anglo-Saxons. In the 7th century, the Serbs and Croats adopted Christianity. Through the process of Christianization, Slavic peoples began to enter the broader European community. From the **9th century**, the brothers Cyril and Methodius took a leading role in the Christianization of the Slavs. They Christianized the Bulgarians and subsequently the Great Moravian Empire. In the **10th century**, the Icelanders and Russians adopted Christianity, while in the **11th century**, the Hungarians, Poles, Norwegians, and Swedes converted to Christianity. Europe also undertook the process of reclaiming the Iberian Peninsula from Muslim rule. From the 11th century onward, Christian kingdoms in Spain grew increasingly stronger. Thus, Christian values became firmly established and increasingly influential throughout Europe.

In written sources from the **9th -10th centuries**, the concept of Europe began to appear not so much as a political or geographical designation, but rather as a concept of community and shared identity. This became particularly evident following the Christianization of Europe. Europe acquired a new meaning - one defined by belonging to the Christian world and by a distinctly Christian identity. The foundation of Europe's formation was the unity of its system of values; in other words, worldview became the basis of European unity (Cantor, 1993). European integration meant Christian unity. The same period coincided with the unification of Western and Eastern Georgia into a single state. The term "Georgia" emerged not merely in a geographical or political sense, but specifically as an expression of Christian unity, much as it was understood in Europe. Georgia became a value-based concept. The Georgian language - the language of prayer - served to unite Georgia. Wherever people prayed in Georgian, there was Georgia. Thus, both in Europe and in Georgia, the role of Christian values was decisive in the process of consolidation.

5. The Evolution of European and Georgian Identity: From the Middle Ages to Modernity

In the 11th century, a process of separation between Church and state began in Europe, whereas in Georgia the Church moved closer to the state. At the end of the 11th century, a movement known as the Gregorian Reform emerged in Europe, transforming both the Church and Christian Europe (Cushing, 2005). Initially, the reform was conceived as a means of freeing the Church from secular authority and from secular interference in ecclesiastical affairs. The reform ultimately resulted in fundamental changes through which God and Caesar, the Pope and the Emperor, were separated. This development was fundamentally different from the model advocated by Eastern Orthodoxy in Byzantium, where the Emperor and the Patriarch governed in close cooperation within a unified framework. In contrast, Western Christianity, particularly after the Gregorian Reform, increasingly emphasized the autonomy of secular authorities and the distinct areas of their responsibility.

During this period, Georgia followed a different path from Europe. Unlike European monarchs, the Georgian King David the Builder maintained a collaborative relationship with the Church, and Christianity formed the foundation of his worldview. The integration of secular and ecclesiastical thought was a key factor in the success of David's rule and activities. David sought to involve the ecclesiastical hierarchy extensively in state administration. To achieve this, he combined two positions - the *mtsignobartukhutsesi* (Chief Secretary) and the Bishop of Chqondidi - thereby bringing together the secular and ecclesiastical spheres. The holder of this combined office was required to be a monk. He became the second-most powerful person after the king and the head of the executive branch - the equivalent of a prime minister. David built a strong society. Thus, while Europe during this period was experiencing a process of separation between Church and state through the Gregorian Reform, in Georgia the Church moved closer to the state. Members of the clergy played a decisive role in secular affairs, resulting in an integration of secular and religious thought.

In the 13th century, Europe embarked on the path toward secularization. Georgia also chose secularism. During the 12th century, Europe experienced active and creative intellectual and cultural development. Science and the arts flourished, but significant changes were also taking place in the European mentality. In Christian art, the role of the individual began to expand considerably, granting greater autonomy to the human being. By the 13th century, important components of European unity and self-perception had become clearly defined (Le Goff, 2005). Educational centers began moving from monasteries into secular spaces. The first universities were established, including the Universities of Bologna, Paris, Oxford, Cambridge, and Montpellier. Europe chose the path of secularization. Georgia during this period also embraced secularism. Under Queen Tamar, Georgia was no longer primarily a value-based concept but rather a political one, with geographical characteristics becoming dominant in its definition - Georgia was described as extending "from Nikopsia to Derbent." Unlike David, Tamar built not a strong society but a strong state. Thus, both in Europe and in Georgia, Christian values were significantly weakened, and the prevailing intellectual and conceptual framework underwent substantial change. In the Late Middle Ages, Europe and Georgia ultimately made a choice in favor of values that departed from traditional Christian principles.

The 14th and 15th centuries in Europe were the age of the Renaissance. Within the European cultural and intellectual world of this period, Italy became particularly significant, emerging as a center of humanism and the Renaissance. Florence is one of the finest examples of the European Renaissance, in which several wealthy merchant-banking families played a decisive role, most notably the Medici family. The philosophy of the Renaissance – humanism - replaced theocentrism with anthropocentrism, placing the human being above God and making humanity the center of the universe. One of the early advocates of humanism, Pico

della Mirandola, wrote: "Adam, I place you at the center of the world, so that from there you may easily see everything that happens around you... You, as a free and skilled creator, must shape yourself into whatever form you desire... You can transform yourself into a divine being" (Pico della Mirandola, 1496/1996). The Renaissance changed the fundamental measure by which thought was evaluated. Previously, Christ had been the measure and reference point in Europe. From this point onward, the human being came to embody the perfect image of God. Thus, humanism became one of the principal forms of European thought.

The 17th and 18th centuries were an age of revolutions in Europe. During the major English and French Revolutions, blood was shed extensively because the pursuit of "great ideals" was considered paramount (Israel, 2011). The purpose of the individual was understood to be the accomplishment of great deeds; therefore, the happiness of the collective was regarded as more important than the suffering of a single individual. This logic was fundamentally opposed to the earlier way of thinking, in which the individual was considered more important than society.

During this period, a different mode of thinking also became established in Georgia. The Georgian nation entered a period of searching for a political savior. For the first time, Georgian society admitted the idea of a political savior into its worldview. What Georgians needed, it came to be believed, was a political protector. The result of this was the entirely ill-calculated steps taken by Vakhtang VI and Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani toward Europe, as well as the decisions made by Erekle II. We believe that Erekle's final decision to orient Georgia toward Russia was outweighed by one of the fundamental values of Georgian unity: to preserve its most important marker of identity – religion - even at the cost of relinquishing sovereign rights. However, the king's choice ultimately failed to achieve this goal.

From the very beginning of the 19th century, beginning in 1801, Russia began eliminating all three markers of Georgian identity: statehood, language, and religion. It successively conquered and annexed the Georgian kingdoms and principalities and abolished the institution of monarchy in Georgia. The legal status and rights of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Georgian language were also restricted and undermined. Thus, all three markers of Georgian national self-consciousness were dismantled: monarchy, religion, and language. The Russian imperial court refused to allow David, the son of King George XII, to occupy the throne of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti, and Kartli-Kakheti became a Russian province. Georgian rule was subsequently abolished in the kingdoms and principalities of western Georgia as well. In other words, Georgian consciousness was deprived of its principal axis: statehood. Russia prohibited the use of the Georgian language in the educational system and in official administration, thereby undermining the second defining marker of Georgian national self-consciousness: language. For Georgians, language was not merely a means of communication; above all, it was a means of thought. Russia also abolished the autocephaly of the Georgian Church.

6. European and Georgian Identity in the 20th and 21st Centuries

In the 20th century, European society underwent further changes in its worldview, perception of the world, aesthetic ideals, and spiritual outlook, while pseudo-values became increasingly established. One of the defining characteristics of the century was the deification of politics, expressed in the two World Wars and in dictatorial regimes such as Fascism, Nazism, and Communism. Both World Wars began at the initiative of European powers as part of efforts to redistribute the world. Western society faced the danger that Spengler's words might prove prophetic and that the "Decline of the West" might indeed occur (Spengler, 1918/2024).

The First World War is regarded as one of the epochal events of the 20th century that changed the face of the world. It marked the beginning of a new historical era. Germany was particularly affected by the consequences of the First World War, which was part of the Allies' intended strategy. A crisis of Western civilization began to emerge. Different models for overcoming the crisis were developed in Europe and the United States. In the United States, a neoliberal model was developed. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's so-called "New Deal" involved state participation in regulating economic problems, government control over the financial sector, and support for agricultural enterprises.

Germany took a very different path in its attempt to overcome the crisis. Its defeat in the First World War and the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Versailles created conditions conducive to the emergence of fascism. Fascism offered Europe an alternative model of government. Its principal ideas included strong state control over economic life and the creation

of a socially organized German society through the oppression and physical destruction - including genocide - of peoples who were declared inferior. It also promoted the total subordination of society to the state and its unification around a leader, the Führer, as well as control over every sphere of life, including the personal and spiritual spheres (Evans, 2003).

In 1933, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler as Reich Chancellor. The Third Reich came to power. The fascist party eliminated the Social Democrats and the communist opposition and brought together different sections of society around a single idea: the idea of German, or "Aryan," racial world domination. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler presented his ideas and objectives. Germany's initial agreements with the Vatican and Britain created a favorable impression of Hitler among European governments. However, the situation changed from 1938, when Hitler began the process of dismantling Czechoslovakia. This was followed by the outbreak of the Second World War, which claimed the lives of approximately 3% of the world's population at the time.

Overall, the Second World War claimed an estimated 70-85 million lives. Military operations directly resulted in the deaths of approximately 50-56 million people, both military personnel and civilians. In addition, deaths caused by war-related disease and famine are estimated to have ranged from 19 to 28 million. The Second World War involved 72 states, whose populations together accounted for approximately 80% of the world's population at the time. Fighting took place between 1939 and 1945 across the territories of 40 countries (Weinberg, 2005). As for Georgia, approximately 24% of the population of Georgia at the time participated in the Second World War. Even Germany did not experience mobilization on such a scale during its largest mobilization efforts. Approximately 700,000 Georgians were drafted, of whom around 300,000 died.

The 20th century was also characterized by the collapse of the colonial system. Between 1945 and 1970, approximately 100 new sovereign states emerged in place of former colonies and politically dependent territories (Shipway, 2008). The 20th century was also a century of major achievements and discoveries. In the 1980s, the political landscape of the world began to change. Social democrats were replaced by conservatives, including Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. In the 1990s, liberals came to power in many countries, including Tony Blair and Angela Merkel. Liberalism became the dominant political tendency in the world. During the 20th century, the worldview of global society also changed. The major ideals of this period became liberalization, democratization, globalization, parliamentarianism, and human rights. "Nothing is guaranteed." This became a slogan of postmodernity. In this new reality, and within a new secular society, defining one's place in the world became closely connected with a reassessment of values. The European system of values underwent profound transformation. In the 21st century, humanity has undergone enormous technological changes. Against this background, humanity has come to believe that it has mastered nature and gained dominance over it. Artificial intelligence has been created, and politics has become even more idolized.

In the contemporary world, the historical consciousness and national identities of both Europe and Georgia have been disrupted. The shared values constitute a foundation for Georgia's European integration, while its cultural particularities form part of Europe's diversity rather than an obstacle to it. In the model of the modern state, there should be co-creative cooperation among political authority, ecclesiastical authority, and society, united in service to a common ideal and guided by shared values. Neither the state, nor the Church, nor society can accomplish this independently. All three branches must work together to achieve it.

7. Discussion

The comparative analysis of European and Georgian identities reveals that, despite their distinct historical trajectories, both developed within a shared Christian civilizational framework. Christianity served not only as a religious foundation but also as a major factor in shaping collective consciousness, cultural values, political institutions and perceptions of belonging.

One of the most significant findings of this study concerns the different ways in which Christianity influenced the formation of Georgian and Roman political and cultural identities. The adoption of Christianity by Constantine and Mirian represented a turning point in the history of both communities. Nevertheless, the subsequent development of Christian values followed different patterns. In the Roman world, Christianity gradually became integrated into the imperial political system, whereas in Kartli it assumed a particularly important role in defining the cultural and spiritual foundations of Georgian collective identity. The events of the 5th and 6th centuries further demonstrate the importance of civilizational orientation in the formation of Georgian identity. The political choices made during the reign of Vakhtang Gorgasali and the subsequent decisions of the political elite of Egrisi illustrate the significance of religious and cultural affiliation in Georgia's relationship with the Byzantine world. Another important dimension of the comparison concerns the formation of European and Georgian unity during the medieval period. In Europe, Christianity gradually provided a common cultural and intellectual framework through which different peoples and political communities developed a sense of belonging to a broader Christian world. The emergence of the concept of Europe as a community was closely connected with the expansion of Christianity and the development of shared cultural traditions (Cantor, 1993). A comparable process can be observed in Georgia, where the consolidation of the country's eastern and western territories was accompanied by the strengthening of a common Christian and linguistic identity.

Despite these common foundations, the subsequent institutional development of Europe and Georgia followed different paths. One of the clearest distinctions emerged in the relationship between Church and state. The Gregorian Reform of the eleventh century contributed to the development of a Western European model in which ecclesiastical authority increasingly asserted its institutional autonomy from secular rulers (Cushing, 2005). In Georgia, by contrast, the reign of David the Builder was characterized by close cooperation between royal and ecclesiastical institutions. The integration of religious and secular authority became an important feature of the Georgian political model. The processes of secularization and intellectual transformation further widened the differences between the two historical trajectories. In Europe, the Renaissance, humanism and the development of universities contributed to a gradual transformation of intellectual life and the growing emphasis on human dignity, individual reason and personal autonomy (Le Goff, 2005). The Enlightenment and subsequent political revolutions further strengthened the principles of individual rights, popular sovereignty and the institutional organization of political authority (Israel, 2011). These developments gradually contributed to the formation of modern European political and cultural identity. Georgia's historical experience was different. Although Georgian society also experienced significant intellectual and cultural transformations, its political development was repeatedly interrupted by external pressures and the loss of sovereignty. The 20th century introduced further challenges to both European and Georgian identities. The experience of fascism, Nazism and communism revealed that political projects based on ideological uniformity and the absolute authority of the state could undermine the fundamental principles of a free society (Evans, 2003; Kershaw, 2015).

The findings of this study suggest that the relationship between Georgian and European identities should not be understood either as complete historical uniformity or as an opposition between two incompatible civilizations. Their historical experiences reveal both shared foundations and significant differences. Christianity, the importance of cultural continuity, the development of collective belonging and the preservation of historical memory constitute important points of convergence.

In this respect, European integration should not be interpreted as a process requiring Georgia to abandon its historical and cultural identity. Rather, it should be understood as an opportunity to participate in a common political and institutional framework while contributing its own historical experience and cultural particularities. Ultimately, the comparison demonstrates that the sustainability of both national and supranational communities depends on the ability to maintain a meaningful relationship between shared values, individual freedom, institutional development and cultural diversity.

8. Conclusion

This study has examined the historical and cultural foundations of European and Georgian identities, focusing on their common Christian heritage, distinctive historical trajectories and contemporary relationship within the context of European integration. The comparative analysis demonstrates that national identity is not a static or exclusively political phenomenon. It is a historically evolving form of collective consciousness shaped by shared values, cultural traditions, religious beliefs, historical memory and institutional experience.

The research confirms that Christianity played a fundamental role in the formation of both European and Georgian identities. In Georgia, the adoption of Christianity became a decisive factor in the development of national self-consciousness and contributed to the preservation of cultural and spiritual continuity. In Europe, Christianity provided a common framework through which different peoples gradually developed a broader sense of cultural and civilizational belonging.

The comparative examination also reveals that the relationship between religious and secular authority constituted one of the most significant differences between the two historical experiences. While Western Europe gradually developed institutional arrangements based on the differentiation of ecclesiastical and secular authority, Georgian political development was characterized by periods of close cooperation between the Church and the state.

The study further demonstrates that the preservation of Georgian national identity has historically depended on the continuity of several interconnected elements, particularly statehood, language and religious tradition. European history demonstrates that identity is capable of transformation without necessarily losing its historical foundations. The Renaissance, humanism, the Enlightenment, democratic revolutions and the development of modern political institutions substantially changed European society and its system of values.

In the context of European Union enlargement, the relationship between Georgian national identity and European identity acquires particular significance. The findings of this study indicate that Georgia's European integration should not be perceived as a choice between national identity and European belonging. Rather, these two dimensions can complement and reinforce one another. Georgia's historical and cultural characteristics do not constitute an obstacle to European integration; they represent a distinctive contribution to Europe's broader cultural diversity.

The central conclusion of this research is that a clearly articulated national identity can serve as a foundation for openness, cooperation and participation in a broader European community. Preserving cultural distinctiveness does not require isolation from external influences, just as European integration does not require the abandonment of national traditions.

Thus, the future of both Georgian national identity and European integration depends on the ability to reconcile historical continuity with contemporary transformation. For Georgia, understanding its own historical identity is not a retreat into the past, but an essential condition for defining its place in the present and participating meaningfully in Europe's future.

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