Perceptions of Europe and the Formation of Georgia’s European Identity in the Georgian Press of the First Republic (1918-1921)

ევროპის აღქმა და საქართველოს ევროპული იდენტობის ჩამოყალიბება პირველი რესპუბლიკის ქართულ პრესაში (1918-1921)

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Abstract

Introduction. Throughout the existence of the First Republic of Georgia, Europe emerged as one of the principal orientations of Georgian political and public thought. Following the declaration of independence, questions concerning the country’s foreign-policy orientation, state development, and national self-identification were actively discussed in the Georgian press. In these discussions, Europe was presented not only as an international political space but also as a model of democratic governance, the rule of law, and cultural progress. The aim of this paper is to examine how Europe was perceived in the Georgian periodical press between 1918 and 1921 and what role these perceptions played in the formation of Georgia’s European identity. **Methods.** The study is based on content analysis, discourse analysis, historical-contextual analysis, and comparative analysis of Georgian periodical press materials published between 1918 and 1921. It examines the principal themes, narratives, and assessments related to Europe that appeared in the Georgian press in discussions of political, cultural, and foreign-policy issues. Attention is paid to the ways in which Europe was associated with ideas of democracy, freedom, the rule of law, cultural development, and integration into the international community. **Results.** The findings demonstrate that, in the Georgian press of the First Republic, Europe was perceived not merely as a geographical or political area but also as a value-based and cultural point of reference. Rapprochement with Europe was regarded as an important condition for Georgia’s development. **Conclusion.** These perceptions contributed to the formation of Georgia’s European identity and reveal the historical foundations upon which the country’s European aspirations were based.

Keywords: European identity, perception of Europe, Georgian press, First Republic, European discourse.

აბსტრაქტი

შესავალი: საქართველოს პირველი რესპუბლიკის არსებობის პერიოდში ევროპა ქართული პოლიტიკური და საზოგადოებრივი აზრის ერთ-ერთ უმთავრეს ორიენტირად ჩამოყალიბდა. დამოუკიდებლობის გამოცხადების შემდეგ ქართულ პერიოდულ პრესაში აქტიურად განიხილებოდა ქვეყნის საგარეო-პოლიტიკური ორიენტაციის, სახელმწიფოებრივი განვითარების, ეროვნული თვითიდენტობისა და საერთაშორისო პოლიტიკური კუთვნილების საკითხები. აღნიშნულ დისკუსიებში ევროპა წარმოდგენილი იყო არა მხოლოდ როგორც საერთაშორისო პოლიტიკური სივრცე, არამედ როგორც დემოკრატიული მმართველობის, კანონის უზენაესობისა და კულტურული პროგრესის ღირებულებითი მოდელი. ნაშრომის მიზანია, შეისწავლოს, როგორ აღიქმებოდა ევროპა 1918-1921 წლების ქართულ პერიოდულ პრესაში და რა როლი შეასრულა ამგვარმა აღქმებმა საქართველოს ევროპული იდენტობის

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ჩამოყალიბების პროცესში. **მეთოდები.** კვლევა ეფუძნება 1918-1921 წლებში გამოცემული ქართული პერიოდული პრესის მასალების კონტენტ-ანალიზს, დისკურსის ანალიზს, ისტორიულ-კონტექსტუალურ და შედარებით ანალიზს. ნაშრომში შესწავლილია ევროპასთან დაკავშირებული ძირითადი თემები, ნარატივები და შეფასებები, რომლებიც ქართულ პრესაში პოლიტიკური, კულტურული და საგარეო-პოლიტიკური საკითხების განხილვისას ვლინდებოდა. განსაკუთრებული ყურადღება ეთმობა იმას, თუ როგორ უკავშირდებოდა ევროპული ორიენტაცია დემოკრატიის, თავისუფლების, კანონის უზენაესობის, კულტურული განვითარების, სახელმწიფოებრივი მოდერნიზაციისა და საერთაშორისო თანამეგობრობაში ინტეგრაციის იდეებს. **შედეგები.** კვლევის შედეგები ცხადყოფს, რომ საქართველოს პირველი რესპუბლიკის პერიოდის ქართულ პრესაში ევროპა აღიქმებოდა არა მხოლოდ გეოგრაფიულ ან პოლიტიკურ სივრცედ, არამედ მნიშვნელოვან ღირებულებით და კულტურულ ორიენტირად. ევროპასთან დაახლოება განიხილებოდა ქვეყნის სახელმწიფოებრივი განვითარების, დემოკრატიული ინსტიტუტების განმტკიცებისა და საერთაშორისო ასპარეზზე დამკვიდრების ერთ-ერთ მნიშვნელოვან წინაპირობად. **დასკვნა.** ქართულ პერიოდულ პრესაში ასახული ევროპული ორიენტაცია მნიშვნელოვან როლს ასრულებდა საქართველოს ევროპული იდენტობის ჩამოყალიბების პროცესში. პრესაში წარმოდგენილი პოლიტიკური და საზოგადოებრივი შეხედულებები ავლენს იმ ისტორიულ, ღირებულებით და იდეურ საფუძვლებს, რომლებსაც საქართველოს ევროპული მისწრაფებები ეფუძნებოდა და რომლებიც ქვეყნის პირველი რესპუბლიკის სახელმწიფოებრივი განვითარების კონცეფციაში აისახა.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ევროპული იდენტობა, ევროპის აღქმა, ქართული პრესა, პირველი რესპუბლიკა, ევროპული დისკურსი.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Problem and Relevance

The years 1918-1921 constitute one of the most significant periods in the history of modern Georgian statehood. The declaration of independence on May 26, 1918, marked Georgia's entry into a new political and international environment. Following the collapse of the Russian imperial order, the country faced not only the task of preserving its independence and establishing state institutions but also the challenge of determining its place on the international stage. In this process, particular importance was attached to attitudes toward Europe and perceptions of Georgia's relationship with Europe.

Throughout the existence of the First Republic, the Georgian press constituted an important arena of public and political life. Newspapers not only reported current events but also participated in their interpretation, the formation of public attitudes, and discussions concerning the country's future. Studying the Georgian press therefore makes it possible to examine how Europe was perceived and what significance was attributed to it in relation to Georgia's state development.

In the Georgian press of 1918-1921, Europe was associated with Georgia's security, the preservation of independence, democratic statehood, education, culture, economic development, international recognition, and the country's future. These perceptions were not static. During the initial stage of independence, references to Europe were closely connected with immediate political and military needs; in subsequent years, however, the relationship acquired broader cultural and value-based dimensions.

The press presented the relationship between Georgia and Europe from different perspectives, revealing a gradual reduction in the perceived distance between them. Newspaper materials from 1918-1919 directly linked Georgia's path to Western European democracy, while by the beginning of 1921, relations with Europe had also come to encompass economic development and international legitimacy.

Accordingly, the present study aims to examine the perception of Europe and the formation of Georgia's European identity through the Georgian press of 1918-1921.

The primary sources selected for the study are the newspapers Sakartvelos Respublika (Republic of Georgia) and Ertoba (Unity), two important political publications of the First Republic. Sakartvelos Respublika was published daily in Tbilisi from 1918 to 1921 and served as the official organ of the Government of Georgia, making its publications particularly important for examining state and foreign-policy positions.

Ertoba was a daily Social Democratic publication from 1917 to 1921. From November 1918, it served as the official organ of the Central Committee of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Georgia. Its articles and editorial materials provide an opportunity to identify the attitudes of the ruling political force and the principal directions of the sociopolitical discourse of the period.

A joint analysis of these publications makes it possible to examine perceptions of Europe both within the discourse of the official state press and within the periodical press of the ruling political force, while also identifying their transformation and their political, security-related, cultural, educational, and economic contexts between 1918 and 1921.

The subject of the study is the discourse surrounding the perception of Europe and the formation of Georgia's European identity in the Georgian press of 1918-1921. **The object** of the study is the Georgian periodical press of the First Republic, specifically the newspapers Sakartvelos Respublika (Republic of Georgia) and Ertoba (Unity).

The history of the First Republic of Georgia and the issue of its European orientation have been studied in Georgian scholarly literature from various perspectives. However, an important research question concerns how perceptions of Europe were constructed and transformed within the Georgian press of the period. Of particular interest is the transition from perceiving Europe primarily as a source of specific political and military support to viewing it as a broader cultural, economic, institutional, and value-based space, as well as how this transformation was connected to the formation of Georgia's European identity.

The study therefore examines the arguments through which the Georgian press explained Europe's significance, the fields in which European experience was invoked, and changes in the relationship between Georgia and Europe between 1918 and 1921.

Particular attention is also given to how the European orientation coexisted with national sovereignty. Publications demonstrate that rapprochement with Europe was not regarded as a rejection of national identity. On the contrary, the European orientation was presented as one of the conditions for strengthening the statehood of independent Georgia.

It is precisely this process and its dynamics that have received comparatively limited attention in studies of the Georgian press.

The aim of the study is to examine perceptions of Europe and the formation of Georgia's European identity in the Georgian press of 1918-1921, identifying the political, cultural, economic, and value-based significance attributed to Europe and tracing changes in these perceptions in accordance with historical and political circumstances. The study also seeks to demonstrate how the perception of Georgia as part of the European political and value-based space was formed during the first years of independence.

The objectives of the study are:

- To examine the historical and political context of the Georgian press of 1918-1921 and identify the principal directions of the discourse concerning Europe;
- To analyze the transformation of perceptions of Europe and identify the principal stages of this transformation throughout the existence of the First Republic;
- To examine perceptions linking Europe with Georgia's security, democratic statehood, culture, education, and economic development;
- To determine the role of Georgia's international relations with Europe and the issue of international recognition in the formation of European identity;
- To analyze the relationship between Georgia and Europe, European values, and the coexistence of European orientation and national sovereignty in Georgian press publications;
- To identify the principal trends in perceptions of Europe and the formation of Georgia's European identity based on materials published in Sakartvelos Respublika and Ertoba.
- The research questions are:
- How was Europe represented in the Georgian press of 1918-1921, and how did perceptions of its significance change throughout the existence of the First Republic?
- What political, cultural, institutional, and economic significance was attributed to Europe in the process of Georgia's state development?
- How was the relationship between Georgia and Europe represented in the Georgian press, and to what extent was the European orientation perceived as compatible with national sovereignty?

- What role did the Georgian press play in shaping perceptions of Georgia's European identity?

The study **hypothesizes** that the perception of Europe in the Georgian press of 1918-1921 was a dynamic process initially shaped to a significant extent by Georgia's security concerns, its struggle for independence, and its need for international support. Throughout the existence of the First Republic, however, this perception gradually broadened, and Europe came to be viewed as a model for Georgia's political, institutional, cultural, and economic development and, ultimately, as part of a common value-based space.

The formation of European identity in the Georgian press did not imply the replacement or rejection of national identity. On the contrary, rapprochement with Europe was presented as a means of strengthening the statehood of independent Georgia, promoting democratic development, and establishing the country as a member of the international community.

2. Methodology

The study is based on an analysis of Georgian press publications from 1918-1921 and focuses on the discursive processes through which perceptions of Europe and European identity were formed. The research considers both individual publications and the historical and political context in which they were produced.

The following methods were used in the study:

Content analysis;

Discourse analysis;

Comparative analysis;

Historical-contextual analysis.

Content analysis was used to systematically identify the principal themes and issues in the context of which the Georgian press discussed Europe (Toradze & Maisashvili, 2019).

Discourse analysis was used to determine how perceptions of Europe were constructed and what meanings Europe acquired in different newspaper publications (Tsuladze, 2020).

Historical-contextual analysis is important because the interpretation of publications from 1918-1921 is directly connected with changes in Georgia's political and international situation. The analysis takes into consideration specific political events, international relations, and the processes of state development of the First Republic (Jensen, 2020).

Comparative analysis is used to compare materials published in Sakartvelos Respublika and Ertoba, as well as publications from these newspapers dating from 1918 to 1921, making it possible to identify common tendencies and changes in perceptions of Europe.

3. Literature Review

To examine the First Republic's Western orientation and the formation of European identity, it is important to consider scholarship addressing both the political and social processes of the period and their representation in the press.

The volume edited by Stephen F. Jones, The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012: The First Georgian Republic and Its Successors, is important for understanding the European and democratic development of the First Republic. It examines Georgia in 1918-1921 as a state seeking to establish democratic institutions and strengthen its European orientation, while the free press is presented as an important component of the emerging political and social order (Jones, 2016).

Otar Janelidze's Essays on the History of the Democratic Republic of Georgia examines various aspects of the political and social development of the First Republic, including European values, the multiparty system, pluralism, freedom of the press and expression, and democratic elections. In this context, the press emerges as an important component of the public sphere (Janelidze, 2018).

For understanding the international political situation of the First Republic, Zurab Avalishvili's The Independence of Georgia in International Politics, 1918-1921 is particularly important. The work examines Georgia's international position, the political context of independence, and its relations with European states, providing a basis for understanding the significance of the European political space for Georgian independence (Avalishvili, 1929).

Georgia's foreign policy and relations with the West are examined in Beka Kobakhidze's dissertation, The Georgian Question at the Paris Peace Conference. Based on archival materials, the study analyzes the activities of the Georgian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, the interests of the great powers in the Caucasus, and the geopolitical factors that hindered Georgia's international recognition (Kobakhidze, 2015).

Aleksandre Bendianishvili's the First Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) provides a comprehensive account of the state structure, internal political processes, and socio-economic reforms of the First Republic. The author examines Georgia's European orientation from the perspective of pragmatic diplomacy, including relations with Germany and the Entente states, cooperation with European Social Democratic circles, and efforts to secure international recognition (Bendianishvili, 2001).

In The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, Dmitri Silakadze and his co-authors examine the European orientation from a military-pragmatic perspective, focusing on attempts to obtain weapons and military support from Western states and on the adoption of European military models in the Georgian Army and People's Guard (Silakadze et al., 2021).

Tamar Tadiashvili's the Democratic Republic of Georgia 1918-1921 is important for understanding the political and international context of the First Republic, particularly Georgia's foreign-policy situation and expectations of European support (Tadiashvili, 2009).

Dodo Chumburidze's "Akaki Chkhenkeli's Role in the Restoration of Georgia's Independence" contributes to an understanding of the state-building and foreign-policy development of the First Republic by examining Chkhenkeli's political and diplomatic activities and the international context of Georgian independence (Chumburidze, 2018).

In the context of the First Republic's social and cultural policy, Nino Popiashvili's the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) and the Education of National Minorities examines education, language, and cultural development and their relationship to European values (Popiashvili, 2018).

Otar Janelidze, Mirian Khositashvili, and Levan Taktakishvili's the Printed Word in Tbilisi: 1918-1921 provides material on the publishing, educational, and cultural processes of the First Republic, including the significance of European and American publishing practices, books, literature, literacy, and education (Janelidze, Khositashvili, & Taktakishvili, 2020).

Rusudan Vashakidze's The Idea of Georgia's Independence in the Georgian Press of 1917-1918 examines how the idea of Georgian independence was reflected and politically articulated in four Georgian periodicals - Sakartvelo, Sakhalkho Sakme, Alioni, and Ertoba. The study is particularly important because it considers the press as a space in which public and political ideas were disseminated and shaped (Vashakidze, 2009).

Maia Machavariani's The First World War and the Armistice in the Pages of the Georgian Press of 1918, published in The Beginning of a New Era - The Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921), examines the representation of international political events in the Georgian press (Machavariani, 2018).

Magda Memanishvili's dissertation, The National-Democratic Newspaper Sakartvelo, 1915-1921 (The Problems of Abkhazia, Samachablo, and Saingilo), is important for understanding the ideological and socio-political context of the political press preceding and during the First Republic. It also highlights the newspaper's European intellectual and political connections through Spiridon Kedia's European experience and education in France (Memanishvili, 2011).

Maia Bregadze's dissertation, The Representation of the Socio-Political Processes of the First Republic of Georgia in the Press of 1918-1921, examines the representation of socio-political processes in periodicals representing different political forces, including Georgia's foreign relations, European orientation, and the significance of the democratic model. It is particularly relevant to the present study because it directly addresses European orientation and European development as represented in the press (Bregadze, 2024).

For examining democratic and liberal values in the press of the First Republic, the study "Reflection of Liberal Values in the Georgian Press in 1918-1921" by Mari Tsereteli and Manana Shamilishvili is significant. The authors identify the idea of "Georgian Europeanism," which they regard as an important value-based foundation of Georgian journalism during this period (Shamilishvili & Tsereteli, 2016).

The article by Maia Bregadze and Nana Amiranashvili, "Georgia's European Choice: 1918-1919 Publications of the 'Republic of Georgia' Newspaper for the Relations Between the First Democratic Republic of Georgia and Germany," directly addresses Georgia's European choice and the coverage of relations between Georgia and Germany in Sakartvelos Respublika. Based on a thematic analysis of publications from 1918-1919, the authors examine Germany's political and cultural role in the context of Georgia's European orientation (Amiranashvili & Bregadze, 2024).

Levan Toidze's Political History of Georgia: 1921-1923 is important for understanding the final stage of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and the political processes that followed its dissolution. The press

materials used in the work, including publications from Ertoba, provide additional context for the political and social environment after 1921 (Toidze, 1999).

Overall, the reviewed scholarship provides an important foundation for examining Georgia's European orientation and the role of the press in shaping European identity.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study provides a basis for analyzing the representation of Europe in the Georgian press and its role in shaping perceptions of Europe in Georgia.

Framing theory is used to examine how the Georgian press represented Europe through different interpretive frames - as a guarantor of security, a model of political and institutional development, a space for economic and cultural development, and, ultimately, a community based on shared values (Entman, 1993).

Media systems theory is used to examine how the political and institutional context of the First Republic was reflected in the content of the Georgian press and how the press contributed to shaping perceptions of the country's foreign-policy orientation, relations with Europe, and state development (Hallin & Mancini, 2015).

Social theory is used to highlight the role of the media in shaping public perceptions, values, and identity, particularly in constructing the relationship between Georgia and Europe and in shaping perceptions of Georgia's European identity (Habermas, 1989).

Together, these approaches provide a theoretical basis for analyzing the representation of Europe in the Georgian press and its role in shaping Georgia's European identity.

4. Principal Directions of the European Discourse in the Georgian Press (1918-1921).

The establishment and development of the First Republic of Georgia represented a particularly important stage in the country's political, state, and social self-definition. With the adoption of the Act of Independence on May 26, 1918, Georgia not only declared its independence but also entered a new international and political environment. The collapse of the Russian imperial order raised fundamental questions concerning Georgia's future orientation, security, state structure, and place within the international system. One of the principal arenas in which these questions were debated was the Georgian periodical press.

In Georgian newspapers published between 1918 and 1921, the theme of Europe was not limited to foreign-policy issues. Europe gradually became a frame through which the Georgian press discussed Georgia's security interests, prospects for democratic state-building, economic development, education, culture, and, ultimately, the country's place in the international community. In this respect, the materials published in *Sakartvelos Respublika* and *Ertoba* are particularly significant. Their analysis demonstrates that perceptions of Europe were not uniform but changed in response to the political circumstances of the period. Despite these changes, however, Europe increasingly emerged as both a value-based and a practical reference point for Georgia's development.

4.1. The Perception of Europe as a Guarantor of Independence and Security.

During the first months of independence, one of the most important dimensions of the discourse on Europe in *Sakartvelos Respublika* concerned Georgia's security. In an article published on July 30, 1918, the invitation of German advisers and instructors in military, financial, and food-supply matters was presented not as a sign of dependence but as a necessary condition for the survival of the "young republic" (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1918).

The article explicitly states that Georgia was finding it difficult to address all state-related problems using its own resources alone and that, under the circumstances, assistance from Europe was regarded as a natural necessity. In the same context, cooperation with Germany was presented as a matter of state prudence rather than as a compromise of national interests.

This approach becomes even clearer in the August 6, 1918 issue, when *Sakartvelos Respublika* linked the improvement of Georgia's international position with the discussion of the country's problems in relation to the major political questions facing Europe (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1918).

In September of the same year, the significance of Georgia's cooperation with Germany was assessed even more explicitly. The newspaper stated that the policy of establishing ties with Germany had saved Georgia from physical destruction and Ottoman conquest, secured its political independence, and strengthened its position among states (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1918).

"Germany is essentially interested in the issue of Georgia's independence and, as our ally, has even forced Russia to recognize what it had refused to recognize until recently - to recognize Georgia's independent existence."

This statement appeared in the September 21, 1918 issue of *Sakartvelos Respublika* (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1918, p. 2).

It should be noted, however, that Soviet Russia formally recognized Georgia's independence on May 7, 1920.

At the initial stage in 1918, the discourse concerning Europe was largely shaped by security considerations. Even in publications from the same year, however, a broader conception was already emerging: rapprochement with the West was understood not only as a means of responding to an immediate threat but also as a path toward a new model of state development.

"Our recent history especially demanded that we should not be a people without culture, and that we should possess both the ability and the desire for European development."

This was stated in the September 7, 1918 issue of *Sakartvelos Respublika* (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1918, p. 2).

In this respect, the 1918 materials published in *Ertoba* are particularly noteworthy. In its May 28 issue, the Democratic Republic of Georgia was presented as a space providing a form of refuge for democracy in the Caucasus, whose preservation was considered a matter of interest to "international democracy" (*Ertoba*, 1918).

Within the discourse on relations with Europe, Georgia gradually ceased to be represented merely as a small country receiving external assistance. Instead, it was increasingly portrayed as a state that itself embodied the democratic ideal and therefore deserved the support of international democratic forces. This representation provided an important basis for the subsequent formation of European identity, as the relationship between Georgia and Europe was increasingly constructed in terms of shared values rather than political interests alone.

4.2. Europe as a Model of Cultural, Institutional, and Economic Development.

The perception of Europe in the Georgian press was not confined to foreign-policy orientation. It gradually extended into the cultural, educational, institutional, and economic spheres, while rapprochement with Europe came to be regarded as an important dimension of Georgia's state and social development.

A July 3, 1918, article in *Ertoba* is particularly significant in this regard. Even its subtitle - **"The Road to the West"** demonstrates that the European direction had already become a symbol of political and civilizational choice. The article states that independent Georgia had linked its fate to Germany and that, whereas Georgia had previously encountered European culture through the North, that is, through Russia, this process should now continue westward, through Germany (*Ertoba*, 1918).

The same orientation appears in more specific fields in the 1918 materials of *Sakartvelos Respublika*. For example, in discussions concerning the reorganization of secondary schools, knowledge of European languages was directly linked to becoming acquainted with the "spiritual treasures of advanced nations" and deepening cultural relations with them (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1918).

Europe was thus presented as a space of knowledge, education, and intellectual development. Learning European languages, in turn, was presented as a means of entering the cultural world of other nations.

European experience was also invoked in discussions concerning the development of state institutions. In the September 25, 1918 issue, a speech by Dimitri Uznadze linked the introduction of ethics or another subject in place of religious instruction to the experience of European states (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1918, p. 5).

A similar approach can be observed in discussions of economic policy. In its September 29, 1918 issue, *Sakartvelos Respublika* linked the development of trade and industry "on European soil" with the establishment of a banking system and the development of economic relations with capitalist countries. In this context, the establishment of the German-Caucasian Bank was presented not merely as the creation of a particular financial institution but also as a means of rapprochement with the European economic system (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1918).

An article in *Ertoba* concerning the concession of the Tkibuli coal mines to Italian capitalists provides a further example (*Ertoba*, 1921, p. 2).

Here, it is explicitly stated that the mobilization of Georgia's natural resources required foreign capital, knowledge, and expertise. The industrial development of England and Germany was cited as an example of the effective utilization of coal resources.

4.3. Georgia's Self-Identification within the European Space and International Legitimation.

From the perspective of the formation of European identity, one of the most important dimensions of the discourse concerns the issue of Georgia's international recognition. Throughout 1919, *Sakartvelos Respublika* systematically covered discussions of the Georgian question in Europe, the activities of diplomatic delegations, and the positions of European states.

In a report delivered following David Ghambashidze's return from London in July 1919, it was stated that no European state posed a threat to Georgia and that Britain was particularly attentive and sympathetic toward the country (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1919, p. 2).

A historical overview published the same year concerning the Italian mission demonstrates another noteworthy discursive strategy. The history of Georgian Italian relations was traced back to the reign of David the Builder and to subsequent centuries. Such a historical narrative was not incidental. It provided contemporary relations with Europe with a historical foundation, thereby reducing the perception that Georgia's rapprochement with Europe was merely a political necessity that had emerged in 1918 (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1919, p. 3).

It is precisely in this type of narrative that another important dimension of identity formation becomes apparent: contemporary political choices were legitimized through historical memory.

At the beginning of 1920, Europe's attitude toward Georgia itself became an explicit subject of thematic attention in *Sakartvelos Respublika*. The title of an interview with Akaki Chkhenkeli **"Europe's Attitude toward Georgia"** - indicates that Europe's position had become sufficiently important to Georgia to be treated as a distinct subject of political discussion. According to the publication, Europe's favorable attitude toward Georgia was becoming increasingly apparent (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1920, pp. 2-3).

The next important stage concerned international recognition. In January 1920, the newspaper presented the international recognition of Georgia's independence as a historic event, while by the beginning of 1921 the issue had developed into a symbol of national achievement.

A January 30 article in *Ertoba* emphasized that Georgia had attracted Europe's attention and sympathy through both its domestic affairs and its diplomatic activity, and that international recognition should be regarded as one of the most important stages in the country's consolidation as a state (*Ertoba*, 1921, p. 1).

Recognition of Georgia by European states was not presented in the Georgian press merely as a diplomatic achievement. It was portrayed as evidence of the country's international legitimacy, political maturity, and recognition as a full-fledged member of the international community.

In examining European identity, it is important to consider not only the frequency with which the term "Europe" was used but also the nature of the relationship constructed between "Georgia" and "Europe." From this perspective, the publications of *Sakartvelos Respublika* and *Ertoba* gradually reveal a reduction in the perceived distance between the two.

During the first months of 1918, Georgia was often represented as a small and vulnerable state in need of European assistance. Later, however, Georgia itself was increasingly presented as part of the democratic world. A May 26, 1919 text in *Sakartvelos Respublika* directly linked Georgia's path to Western European democracy, while the statement by Nikoloz Chkheidze that Georgia would "follow Western European democracy step by step" constituted one of the clearest formulations of this self-identification (*Sakartvelos Respublika*, 1919, p. 4).

A publication in the June 15, 1918 issue of *Ertoba* explicitly stated:

"Light comes from the West and not from the East."

(*Ertoba*, 1918, p. 1).

Although geographically distant, Europe thus became politically and in terms of shared values closer to Georgia than its immediate neighbors. This constitutes an important indicator of the formation of a European identity in the Georgian press.

In February 1921, in the context of the struggle against Soviet Russia, *Ertoba* once again employed the vocabulary of a confrontation between democracy and dictatorship. The events of February 19 were presented as a victory for a democratic system in its struggle against a state based on dictatorship, while a February 25 article emphasized that, according to the author, Georgia was not alone: a voice of sympathy was already

being heard from Europe, and this sympathy was expected eventually to be translated into action (*Ertoba*, 1921).

In the articles examined, therefore, the defense of Georgia was presented as part of a broader democratic struggle.

5. Contradictory Aspects of the Perception of Europe: Expectations of Support and Political Skepticism.

Between 1918 and 1921, determining Georgia's foreign-policy orientation was one of the principal tasks of national state-building. Analysis of the periodical press - specifically, the government's official organ, *Sakartvelos Respublika*, and the publication of the ruling Social Democratic Party, *Ertoba* - demonstrates that Georgian socio-political thought did not adopt an unambiguously idealistic attitude toward the Western orientation. The press clearly reflected a pragmatic approach in which cooperation with Western states was regarded as a geopolitical necessity, while their foreign-policy actions were subject to critical evaluation.

In May 1918, simultaneously with the declaration of independence, the Republic of Georgia faced the threat of Ottoman imperial expansion. Under these circumstances, an alliance with the German Empire was assessed by the press as the only guarantee of physical survival. The May 28, 1918, issue of *Ertoba* stated that preserving the Democratic Republic of Georgia was "the only guarantee that saves us from barbarous Ottoman rule" (*Ertoba*, 1918, p. 1).

However, German support and the obligations associated with it were not presented by the press as an entirely unproblematic reality. In its June 15 article, *Ertoba* openly pointed to the negative consequences associated with the growing influence of a European power.

In the autumn of 1918, the defeat of Germany and its allies in the First World War fundamentally altered the regional balance of power.

Whereas *Sakartvelos Respublika* had previously assessed the alliance with Germany not as an ideological choice but as a necessary guarantee of protection against Ottoman expansion, from October-November 1918 the newspaper's rhetoric no longer relied on German protection as the principal security argument.

Following the withdrawal of German troops, the focus of press criticism shifted to the policies of the Entente. Dissatisfaction was expressed with the position of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and the Supreme Council of the Entente, which delayed recognition of Georgia's independence and prioritized the territorial integrity of Russia. An October 17 article in *Ertoba* stated:

"If you add to this Wilson's view that Georgia should be returned to Russia, it will become clear to us how naturally the dream of Russian Armenian chauvinists took wing…"

(*Ertoba*, 1918, p. 1).

The Georgian press criticized the Western approach according to which Russia, despite being engulfed in anarchy, was still regarded as the sovereign power in the Caucasus. *Ertoba* posed the question:

"And how can you imagine that such a major and important region as Transcaucasia, and Georgia in particular, should be handed over to Russia, engulfed in the flames of anarchy…"

(*Ertoba*, 1918, p. 1).

Beyond foreign-policy issues, the press also critically examined European political institutions. A June 28, 1918 article in *Ertoba* argued that the European democratic model should not be treated as an absolute standard and that internal criticism was necessary for state development.

In 1919-1920, the prolonged process of recognition of Georgia's independence by the Allies was assessed in the press as an expression of the self-interested foreign policy of Western states. In the January 30, 1921 issue of *Ertoba*, following the achievement of international recognition, the editorial board looked back on the preceding period and assessed the prolonged hesitation of the West:

"If we look back over the history of our country from the day of its independent existence, we will become convinced that Georgia systematically overcame the coldness, indifference, and often distrust of the great powers."

(*Ertoba*, 1921, p. 1).

In February 1921, following Soviet Russia's attack, the Georgian press sought both to mobilize public opinion and to assess the actual scale of Western support. An article by S. Devdarian, **"We Are Not Alone,"** published in the February 25 issue of *Ertoba*, focused on the "voice of sympathy" coming from Europe while simultaneously expressing expectations of concrete and effective action (*Ertoba*, 1921).

As the articles examined here demonstrate, between 1918 and 1921 the Georgian press's perception of Europe was simultaneously shaped by the necessity of cooperation with Western states, the aspiration to establish Georgia within the European political and cultural space, and a critical assessment of Western political decisions.

6. Conclusion.

Analysis of the materials published in *Sakartvelos Respublika* and *Ertoba* demonstrates that the European discourse of the Georgian press between 1918 and 1921 was dynamic and multilayered. During the initial stage of independence, Europe was primarily presented as a source of security, political support, and international legitimacy. Publications concerning Germany demonstrate that the European orientation was initially shaped to a significant extent by specific political and military circumstances. This practical necessity, however, soon developed into a broader political and value-based orientation.

Throughout 1918, according to the Georgian press, Europe gradually emerged as a model for democratic state-building. The press invoked European experience in discussions of education, ethics, economics, the banking system, industry, and culture. At the same time, relations with Europe became increasingly associated with the strengthening of Georgia's international position.

In 1919-1920, this process deepened further. Diplomatic relations with European states, discussions of the Georgian question at international conferences, the positions of Britain, Italy, France, and other states, economic agreements, and prospects for establishing connections with European markets demonstrate that Europe was increasingly conceived of as a long-term space for Georgia's development.

At the beginning of 1921, this perception became even more pronounced. Economic relations with Europe were associated with hopes for the country's economic revival; international recognition was presented as evidence of state maturity; and the struggle against Soviet Russia was interpreted in the context of a broader confrontation between democracy and dictatorship.

At the same time, the study demonstrates that the European orientation in the Georgian press did not imply unconditional acceptance of the policies of Western states. Expectations of support and protection were accompanied by critical assessments of Western decisions, particularly when Western policy conflicted with Georgia's interests in preserving independence. Thus, the desire for rapprochement with Europe and political skepticism toward the West were not mutually exclusive but rather coexisting components of the same pragmatic and value-based discourse.

Europe gradually became the cultural, political, economic, and value-based space through which perceptions of Georgia's future were articulated. In this process, European identity did not imply the rejection of national identity. On the contrary, in the discourse of the Georgian press, Georgia's independence and rapprochement with Europe were presented as mutually compatible processes: independent Georgia was expected to become a democratic state and, precisely on the basis of its democratic character, establish its place within the European and international community.

According to the Georgian press, Europe was initially presented as a guarantee of security, then as a political and institutional model, later as a space for economic and cultural development, and ultimately as a value-based community within which Georgia conceived of itself as an independent and democratic state.

It is precisely this development in the discourse that demonstrates the particular role of the Georgian press of the First Republic. The press did not merely describe Georgia's relationship with Europe; it also contributed to shaping a framework through which society could understand Georgia's place within a new international reality. Consequently, the study's hypothesis is supported. Through the continuous articulation, interpretation, and interconnection of political, economic, cultural, and democratic narratives concerning Europe, the press contributed to the formation of a perception that Georgia's state future and its European orientation were closely interconnected.

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