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**Formation of NATO in 1949** laid the ground-work for the founding of a free, peaceful and economically prosperous Europe. The principle of collective defense based on the values of liberal democracy created the necessary preconditions for the safe development of the member states. After the end of the Cold War, the alliance began to expand in order to establish Europe Whole, Free and at Peace. Prospect of the NATO membership created strong incentives for the newly liberated Eastern and Central European countries to carry out systemic and institutional reforms. NATO enlargement process itself also created institutional mechanisms to implement those reforms through direct engagement and substantial assistance of NATO member states. New members received security guarantees that played a crucial role in the further economic and democratic development of these countries. During the 1990s and the 2000s, Europe reached almost unprecedented level of growth of security and prosperity. Europe became much more stable and economically developed.



Georgia's Euro-Atlantic choice is based on nation's decision to build a democratic state that shall provide the rights and freedoms to the citizens, provides all the preconditions for economic development and prosperity. Full consolidation of democracy and economic development is impossible without the security guarantees. Such security guarantees in our region can be reached by NATO membership.

Russia always was opposing NATO expansion. The main reason of it lays in its traditional approach to international relations and understanding of interests of state. Russia finds the fragility and instability of the political system of the neighboring states, low level of their economic development and their corrupt and authoritarian state and governance institutions to be desired conditions to spread its influence over them. On the contrary, Russia considers the success of its neighbors in democratic transformation and their developed economy to be limiting factor of its influence on them and consequently, against Russian interests. Therefore, expansion of the organization of collective defense of free countries that is creating basis for the long term secure and stable development of the countries as well as limiting Russia's ability of militarily intervening in these countries, was never welcomed in Russia.

#### Georgia's Quest

NATO membership is a precondition for the further sustainable democratic and economic development of Georgia. When deciding on granting a new state with the Alliance membership, NATO takes into account its strategic goals and aims as well as democratic and institutional development of the aspirant state.

NATO integration requires strengthening of the democratic institutions. The dynamic evolution of NATO's Eastward expansion got stuck in 2008. While at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, Georgia and Ukraine were promised the membership, there are no signs of political decisions to grant Georgia the institutional mechanism – Membership Action Plan, - to achieve it. That sort of political decision as well as further NATO expansion mainly depends on strategic issues in the frames of current security environment as well as on the assessment or understanding of the readiness of the aspirant state by the member



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states.

Despite there is a single vision of the Alliance that Georgia will become a NATO member one day, there is no single consensus among the member states about the terms of further NATO Eastern expansion. It is obvious that Russia is trying to alter the conventional order and access the legalization of its spheres of influence over the European continent. Those who skeptically estimate NATO further expansion believe that any step towards NATO Eastern expansion shall provoke Russia's even more aggressive activity. Russia will emerge more military, energy, economic, trade and other types of problems, especially in the Eastern Europe. These problems, in turn, may develop into worse crisis and Western community may have to pay high political and economic price. At the same time, they will have very negative impact on the overall European security and stability. This kind of approach is widely cultivated by Russian propaganda as well as its political and diplomatic circles.

However, there is an opposite approach that if, in response to Russia's revisionist and aggressive policy, the West halts and reconsiders the process of building the Europe Whole, Free and at Peace it will only encourage Russia to use its forceful efforts to raise instability in Europe and thus, achieve the growth of its influence. That, in turn, will lead Europe to a permanent state of crisis. Russia shall receive additional stimulus and confidence that by means of so-called Hybrid War methods it will become able to emerge different types of crises on the continent in order to effectuate its own interests. Russia tries to legitimize the spheres of influence in Europe, to establish new borderlines and to maintain its influence by constant destabilizing impact on neighboring countries and through the delay of their development. Supporters of this approach also have an argument that Russia will not be satisfied

only by creating the above-mentioned dividing lines and in a long run, will continue its efforts to weaken the Euro-Atlantic community through emerging of the new crises, which shall result into weakening of European stability and security. Therefore, the West should persistently keep on developing the Europe Whole, Free and at Peace based on the sovereign right of each state to choose its own path of development and the alliances they wish to join. According to this approach, NATO's expansion must continue and the terms of this expansion should be defined only by the estimation of the readiness of the aspirant states. This, in turn, will reduce the effectiveness of the Russian revisionist policy as well as incentives to boost its impact on the domestic political regime through Russia's aggressive foreign policy.


Perception of the readiness of Georgia as a NATO aspirant state to move to the next stage of the Alliance integration is of utmost importance and even vital in the discussions related to NATO further expansion. This perception is defined by Georgia's democratic development, its adherence to democratic principles and procedures, respect for democratic institutions and their stability, economic growth, responsible approach to European and international security issues and its eagerness and capacity to contribute to international security. Undoubtedly, current Georgia-NATO cooperation mechanisms are very valuable. Fulfilling of all the requirements of the provisions of the Annual National Plan and the Defence Planning and Review Process is necessary but insufficient steps to achieve the desired perception. All the important decisions of the Alliance are taken in the capitals of the NATO member states and the understanding of the level of democracy and institutional development of a certain state is also cultivated in those capitals. Therefore, the evaluation of Georgia's readiness, its quality

of democracy, effectiveness and sustainability of democratic institutions and consecution of reforms is conducted in a much more sophisticated way and is not framed just by the quality of performance of the obligations undertaken via NATO cooperation mechanisms.

Currently, there is no mutual understanding of terms of NATO further expansion within the Alliance member-states. It is hard to say if how the process shall develop until the Warsaw Summit in 2016. Before the Warsaw Summit, it is vital for Georgia to set up the plan and implement the reforms. It also should establish consistent communication strategy. That should help to achieve the progress in Georgia's NATO integration process and strengthen the support of the integration process among the population



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and create the realistic expectations with respect of the Summit. Discussions over the terms of NATO's further expansion shall have the most significant impact on the situation in Ukraine and the threats from Russia against stability and security of Europe. In respect of Georgia, those decisions will take into account the perception of the quality of democracy and implemented reforms. Georgia should aim to strengthen the reasons of those states that support Georgia's rapid NATO integration and weaken the positions of those states, which are against it. Decision taken on Bucharest Summit, which was subsequently confirmed at all NATO Summits, confirms Georgia to become the NATO member state. It's not about "IF", but "WHEN". This is the main point of NATO expansion discussions. In order to have tangible progress in further integration process, it is necessary to strengthen arguments for Georgia's NATO membership. To support those reasons and neutralize the existing skepticism Georgia should undoubtedly prove

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that it is pursuing the necessary reforms in order to strengthen democratic institutions, implement the modernization of the state institutions and establish effective governance. Georgia should demonstrate its responsible approach to global and European security. Moreover, it is extremely important to show the efforts of the Georgian government to further strengthen the consensus on the issue related to NATO membership among the political elite and general public.

Most important issues in evaluation of Georgia's progress are as follows:

**Democracy:** This is a crucial issue. Georgia can claim the membership of the alliance only at the point, when it is not just the state with transition democracy, but a state that takes decisive and irreversible steps to consolidate the democracy. Here it is very important to perform reforms in order to establish the rule of law, including reforms of judicial and prosecution systems, reforms of security sector including the strengthening of public control and including reforms concerning the Ministry of Internal Affairs, strengthening of democratic institutions and institutional governance, free media, fair election system. Any deviation from the consolidation of democracy either in a form of selective prosecution or non-institutional







governance will reduce chances of NATO integration of Georgia or even abolish them at all.

**Effective Governance:** Alliance membership is a big responsibility. Allies want new users to have effective mechanisms and institutions to develop, analyze, implement and manage public policy that are in full compliance with the principles of democracy and the rule of law. Naturally, the Alliance is mostly interested in the security and defense policies, but other features of public policy also play important role in evaluation of the effective governance of the certain state. While evaluating the effectiveness of the security, foreign and defense policies of the state, special attention is paid to the coordination mechanisms of the government, issues related to defense planning and adequate financing and the effectiveness of the defense system.

**European Security:** The indivisibility of the European security is one of the fundamental principles of the European security architecture. Willingness to contribute to the European and global secu-



rity is of extreme significance. Georgia has always been a responsible member of the international community and actively involved in the allies and the NATO-led peacekeeping and stabilizing international operations. Georgia also proactively cooperates with NATO and allies on international security issues. Georgia's further efforts and consistency in following this approach shall strengthen its image as a responsible partner. Recent events in Ukraine and Georgia's position should also be noted. Russian occupation of the Crimea and its subsequent annexation as well as the proxy-war in the Eastern Ukraine encouraged and supported by Russia in which the Russian military troops also took their part, have become a major challenge for European security and stability. Strengthening of sovereignty and territorial integrity of

Ukraine is very important to Georgia as well. The concept of Europe Whole, Free and at Peace cannot be realized without Ukraine. Therefore, supporting Ukraine is dictated not only by the sympathy but it is a vital strategic interest of Georgia. Georgia can and should provide Ukraine with more political support. While supporting Ukraine, Georgia positions itself as a supporter of the common European security and makes the occupation of our country of current concern for international community. As for cooperation for the NATO membership, it is vital that NATO keeps the Bucharest decision in force and regularly reassures this decision with regard to Ukraine. However, at this stage, Ukraine should define for itself if when and at what speed to join the NATO. Subsequently, upon the decision of the Ukraine for Warsaw Summit and the general state of affairs at that time and taking into account results of the discussions among the Alliance members, effective ways of cooperation might

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be elaborated during the preparation of the Warsaw Summit.

## Pros for Georgia

Obviously, all the reforms that are obligatory for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration, first of all, serve to the development of Georgia. Mechanisms of cooperation with the Alliance are the effective institutional tools that will help Georgia to implement those reforms. In addition, this procedure involves NATO member states to participate in the reform implementation process in various ways. Despite political importance, MAP is valuable since it provides comprehensive institutional mechanisms allowing Allies to assist Georgia in reform implementation and to participate in the process more.

Major arguments in the process of taking favorable to Georgia decision regarding the NATO membership are as follows:

1. Example of Successful Democracy Spreading. According to the thesis of democratic peace, democratic states are more stable and peaceful. Russian revisionist and aggressive policy is targeting the establishment of liberal democracy in the neighboring countries. Georgia's progress in its NATO integration path will not only strengthen the regional security, but will also serve as a stimulus for other states to start their own liberalization process. The perspective of the NATO membership was a powerful stimulus for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to properly launch and manage dynamic democratic, economic and institutional reforms that led them to their success. Georgia's progress in its Euro-Atlantic integration process shall become an incentive to the other states in the region to implement reforms as well.
2. Energy Security. Georgia already is the important energy hub that provides the transportation of the Caspian oil and gas over its territory to the European markets bypassing by Russia. On the one hand, this makes Europe less

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energy dependent on Russia and, on the other hand, it also makes oil and gas producers less dependent on Russian energy infrastructure. Russia's energy infrastructure, as a rule, is often used for political purposes. Georgia's transit potential is even greater. Georgia's success may give a necessary sparkle for the development of the Trans-Caspian energy projects, which, in turn, will not only strengthen Europe's energy independence, but also will open new opportunities for the states of Central Asia and reduce their dependence on Russian energy infrastructure.

3. Terrorism Threat. As it was already noted above, Georgia has performed itself as a reliable partner in the fight against terrorism and in the international military operations. Georgia participates in NATO and EU-led international peace-keeping missions.

Why now?

Russia threatened the stability, security and the order of Europe as well as of the whole continent by applying military aggression toward Georgia and occupying part of its territory in 2008 and later – by the annexation of the Crimea and unleashing of combat activities in the Eastern Ukraine. Russia also tries to disrupt those international institutions that have





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been providing the stability and security of the Continent over the years. In the meantime, Russia is trying to draw new dividing lines in Europe, which will result in permanent conflicts due to shifting of those lines. Thereafter, a clear message on NATO expansion will be another demonstration of the Euro-Atlantic unity versus the increasing threat from Russia. Such a message is absolutely necessary to emphasize once again that despite Russia's aggressive policy, the formation of a united and peaceful Europe is still in progress and it is impossible to interrupt this process forcefully. Besides, that message will also prove that Russia, through its aggressive actions, is still unable to discontinue the development of democracy in its neighborhood.

Even those states that look skeptical at the terms of NATO integration, do not deny (at least, during the formal communication), that Georgia will become a NATO member. This decision was taken at the summit in Bucharest in 2008 and subsequently, it was confirmed at all of the following summits. The main arguments are around the question if how risky it would be to allow any radical steps to be taken at this point (Warsaw Summit) in terms of overall security. Consequently, it is essential that Georgia presents strong reasons to support the necessity of achieving the clear and significant progress on its Euro-Atlantic integration path at this very stage. Georgia shall present its reasons to the NATO member states during the Summit preparation process. Those reasons may consist of the following:

1. Parliamentary elections in 2012 and Presidential elections in 2013 were evaluated by the Alliance to be the tests of democracy but Georgia made not even a step towards NATO integration. It's extremely important that the Alliance clearly follows the NATO policy that involves the formalization of the progress of the aspirant state on the basis of evaluation

of its democratic and institutional reforms and its strong support;

2. Taking into account the recent event in Ukraine, at this point Russia will consider or, in a better case, will just present it as a fact that the delay of the decision on NATO expansion is caused by the influence of its aggressive and threatening policy. This, in turn, will encourage the Kremlin's policy of creating a permanent crisis points on the European continent;

3. Membership Action Plan (MAP) will be an additional incentive for implementation of democratic reforms in Georgia as well as for institutionalization of those reforms and at the same time, the Allies shall be able to have institutional mechanisms of engaging in Georgian reforms of their sphere of interest;

4. Despite the fact that the neighboring countries do not consider Euro-Atlantic integration as a mean of their security or the aim of their foreign policy, they positively estimate Georgia's possible NATO membership and find that this will strengthen regional security and stability.

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It is necessary for the government to have a clear vision and action plan for the coming year and before the NATO Summit in Poland. This Plan, among the others, should include the issues concerning Georgia's democratic and institutional development, diplomatic strategy, communication strategy and the reforms in the field of security. Any progress in any of those fields will be crucial for achieving the significant success in Georgia's NATO integration path. Some ideas concerning the certain components of that action plan can be found below:

1. Strengthening of the national consensus over the European and Euro-Atlantic integration. While the majority of the population supports Georgia's NATO



integration, the government should do its best to strengthen the national consensus on this issue. This becomes especially important under the informational war that Russia declared against Georgia. Public statements and political rhetoric that aim to split the society might have truly dramatic consequences for the country. One of the goals of the Russia's informational war against Georgia is the extreme polarization of the population. However, it is absolutely necessary to permanently make clear explanations if why it is so vital for Georgia to achieve the Euro-Atlantic integration in the future. Political opposition and civil society groups also have their roles in the consensus-building process but since the influence of the government institutions in all aspects of public life is still impressive (which is not good at all), the government has to undertake much more responsibility in this field.

2. Clear governmental position and policy. It is necessary to make clear the government's position and policy regarding the NATO integration. This should involve much more than regular statements that Georgia's NATO membership is our priority. It is important to rule out any dimness over this issue that emerges time by time due to the statements of certain members of the ruling coalition - the ones who are in conflict with the

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declared policy. When it is stated that the NATO integration is the priority for the state all the government resources should be mobilized to implement necessary reforms in different areas of public policy and to ensure the involvement of the NATO member states in the process of implementation of those reforms.

3. Development of democratic institutions and effective governance. Level of democracy, the rule of law and effective governance are the most important criteria, which affect the Allies decisions when evaluating the progress of the aspirant state. Country has been criticized for selective justice, excessive use of pretrial detentions as well as for non-institutional Governance. If any, even perception, of the selective justice, politically motivated prosecution or non-institutional governance, exist, Georgia shall lose its chance to achieve progress.

4. Active diplomacy. If not take into account the efforts concerning the UN resolution on the refugees and the preparations before the Wales Summit in order to receive substantial package, Georgian diplomacy demonstrated none of any special Not Georgian diplomatic missions but Georgian government should have put the issues related to the national security on the international agenda and had proactive coordination with the Allies to form the strategies of foreign policy. Too high expectations as well as too many political investments were tied to so-called Abashidze-Karasin talks format that resulted into no results but created many illusions. Such an approach is the reason of Georgia's national security issue lost its urgency within the agenda of international diplomacy and for the international press and strategic research centers. Before the Summit in Poland it becomes especially important to alter such this approach. Effective strategic communication as well as coherent and active foreign policy strategy must be elaborated. This

strategy shall be developed based on the intensive consultations with NATO member states and close cooperation with the western academic circles. In order to effectively develop and implement this strategy it is necessary to perfect the internal institutional mechanisms of policy implementation and provide strong domestic support.

5. Reforms of security sector. Independent observer can easily detect the gaps in the elaboration and coordination of national security policy. Formation and implementation of the common foreign and security policy by the government seems very unclear. Activities in this direction have mostly responsive character rather to be a part of a coherent strategy. This may be caused by the institutional mechanisms received due new constitutional governance that has certain gaps and there is no practice of clear division of functions, powers, and competence and decision-making procedures. It is essential to improve those mechanisms in order to increase the efficiency of establishing the common visions and creating effective policy-making and decision-making systems. It is also important to make clear distinctions between the competences during the decision-making process, provide active involvement and decentralize the strategy implementation





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process in order to increase its effectiveness. The reform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is under the close focus of our partners. Within the frames of this reform, it is particularly important to perform the accurate split (of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Security Service) between powers of the institutions, establish services of effective and democratic standards, transform the MIA into the civic body, determine the functions and the role of the newly founded service in a whole political system and create effective institutional mechanisms of parliamentary as well as public supervision and control over the both agencies. The cornerstones of the reform should be the setting up of such a personnel management system that will clearly define the criteria of career promotion and professional education. This is the reform of utmost importance in the attempt to prevent the politicization of the agencies.

6. Alliance member states are particularly interested in State Defense. Notwithstanding the plenty of challenges ahead, this field, perhaps, is the avant-garde of successful reform-implementation among the other state institutions. Adequate funding of this field is crucial - the proportion of personnel expenditures and operational and capital costs should be altered. The portion of the personnel expenditure is inadequately high and emerges problems on the way of maintaining the combat capability, development of critical capacity and infrastructure. Taking into account current threats and challenges, it would be a reasonable solution to increase the defence budget up to 15-18%. However, the closest target is to speedily and effectively implement NATO essential packages received at the Summit in Wales and elaborate the critical defence capability development plan. Personnel management reform is one of the important institutional reforms and it should be properly implemented. This reform

should perfect the conditions of the military service, career management and professional education.

Perhaps it is still worth mentioning that all those reforms serve for the strengthening and development of the Georgian statehood and for improving the democratic institutions and that is the reason of Alliance members to have a vivid interest in them. Actual progress achieved through the reform implementation and not only public statements clearly demonstrate how serious the aspiration of the country to Euro-Atlantic integration is and if it has enough readiness and willingness to become the a member of the Alliance.

#### Principles of Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy

Proactive communication with the NATO member states is essential during the Warsaw Summit preparation process. This communication should aim to become better informed about the position of the member states regarding the NATO expansion as well as their interests, visions and arguments, which affect the formation of their positions. We should well know the details of their strategic vision of European security, NATO's future and developments in our region. Consequently, we should provide our partners with the detailed information about Georgia's strategic visions, situation in the country, domestic affairs and the forthcoming reforms. It is also important to involve the interested member states in the process of reform implementation. This will have a positive impact on the reform implementation itself and will also increase the level of trust of the country. In many cases, such communication is of crucial importance in the formation of the position. Many NATO states have insufficient expert information about Georgia and the region generally and the independent expert judg-



ments are even more rare. That is why an active and accurate communication is crucial while the engagement of these states are critical as well.

There are no doubts that the government should become the main player in the communication strategy but communication on the non-governmental, academic and media levels are also very important. During the following year enormous steps should be done toward this kind of communication. In the nearest future it is necessary to intensify bilateral political consultations with NATO member states and conduct constant communication rendezvous with high-level decision-makers. This kind of activity has to be started immediately and not be delayed until the two weeks before the Summit and limited to few meeting with some of the leaders. It is important to coordinate the positions of the permanent active supporters. The parliamentary mechanisms should also be activated. Georgia should encourage academic, media and non-governmental circles to intensify their contacts. Conferences, workshops and research centers are highly effective means of communication enhancement. We should also use the potential of the international and foreign research centers during the strategy and policy making processes. It is absolutely vital to encourage the international media representatives to visit Georgia as often as possible.

#### Principles of Internal Communication

Georgia's policy on NATO integration is based on the public consensus, which means that Georgian citizens support the idea of NATO membership and there is a wide political consensus within the political spectrum. Along with the establishing of democratic society and the general processes of modernization, this consensus is the one of the main targets of the Russian informational war. According to the latest opinion polls, the number of supporters of Georgia's NATO



integration process in Georgia society is steadily high. However, these polls also demonstrate some of the existing risks[1]. Simultaneously to active Russian propaganda, it is necessary to promote pro-democratic and pro-Western sentiments.

Russian propaganda. Russian information war against Georgia and shapes of this war are the another subjects to study. The potential of the academic as well as non-governmental sectors should be maximally used and the attention of the international donors should be attracted more intensively. It is also important to pay more attention to the issues of international donors. Georgian NGOs are already working in this direction and the support of the donor organizations is crucial. Russian propaganda mainly targets on the process of the modernization of Georgia and generally, democratic values. Since the result of the successful management of this process shall bring the NATO membership to Georgia, it becomes the main designation of this propaganda. Russian propaganda involves several messages that intend to undermine the public opinion. Russian propaganda, on the one hand, is consistently and deliberately trying to discredit the democratic values in general and, on the other hand, tries to grow nihilism among the public by drawing the Euro-Atlantic integration as a unreachable goal. As the best practice shows, within the frames of public communication usage of counter-propaganda is an inefficient method to neutralize Russian soft power, since its operating in a reactive mode and follows the given agenda. It would be better to focus the communication on defining the strategic objectives and their importance to the country.

Government must have the unified and consolidated message confirming the firmness of the NATO integration policy and the clear position that NATO mem-

bership is not just another political issue, but the most important one regarding the national security and the major priority of the state.

Acute political polarization has an extremely negative impact on the overall state development process as well as on specific priorities. It is important to achieve the consolidate of the whole political spectrum on the issues related to NATO integration and that consensus should be not only declared, but also implemented in practice. Government has special responsibility in this process. Expectations with regard to the terms of NATO membership should also be managed. Artificial raise of those expectations is completely counterproductive and creates the danger of increase of the frustration degree if those expectations are not met. However, Georgian government should never avoid discussions over the NATO integration process and should always announce the on-going objectives.

Russian propaganda uses wide range and different forms of communication to spread its propagandistic messages including Russian state-controlled media, different forms of public activity and even Georgian media organizations. Therefore, in order to avoid this threat



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and effectively conduct successful communication it is important to select the effective ways of message delivery. This may include the direct works with certain community groups, involving public celebrities in the process, visualization of the messages and other innovative forms. It is also essential to use the assistance of the partner states and the best modern practice.

[1] <http://www.iri.org/resource/iri-georgia-poll-georgians-are-less-optimistic-continue-desire-deeper-ties-west-wary>

